Ruckelshaus Says Reagan Made 'Offer'

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By Jules Witcover
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Former Deputy Attorney General William D. Ruckelshaus, one of the victims of President Nixon's "Saturday Night Massacre" of 1974, said last night he received what he considered a "hard offer" to be Ronald Reagan's running mate three weeks ago.

Ruckelshaus said he told John P. Sears, Reagan's chief strategist, and L. Keith Bulen, former Republican national committeeman from Indiana, who, he said extended the offer, he would have to talk to Reagan first. They told him, he said, they would set up a meeting and get back to him.

But the next thing he heard, Ruckelshaus said, was word from Bulen in a phone call Sunday night that because Reagan had fallen behind in the delegate count it had been decided they had to ask Sen. Richard S. Schweiker of Pennsylvania to run, "to boost his chances" in the Northeast. Reagan announced his choice Monday morning.

At Reagan headquarters, James Lake, his press secretary, denied that any hard offer had ever been made

See OFFER, A5, Col. 6

OFFER, From A1

to Ruckelshaus. "They [Sears and Bulen] talked to him to find out whether he'd have any interest, going back as far as four months ago," Lake said. "But there never was a hard offer made until the one to Schweiker."

Ruckelshaus said the offer came in a meeting with Sears and Bulen at the Federal City Club in the late afternoon, on or about July 6. he said Sears had first broached the idea about six months ago and again about six weeks ago, before finally saying they "had pretty much decided" on him three weeks ago.

The offer, Ruckelshaus said, was premised "on the assumption they were clearly going to win the nomination and needed help in the Middle West in the general election. Ruckelshaus said he pointed out he was a delegate for President Ford and therefore "was not interested before the convention." He said he could consider the possibility only if Mr. Ford lost the nomination to Reagan, thus relieving him of his commitment to the President.

But in the intervening time, the former Justice Department official said, their confidence about winning had obviously slipped, changing the assumption and hence the requirement for a running mate.

Bulen told him Sunday night, he said, he was sorry "They weren't able to carry through on the original offer they made, but I understand that, because the assumption on which it was made had changed."

Schweicker, in accepting the nomination Monday, made a special point that he was Reagan's first and only choice. "I am proud of the leadership Gov. Reagan has shown in this striking departure from the old-style politics," he said, "and I am especially proud to have been Gov. Reagan's first choice, not his third, or fourth, or fifth choice for this position."

Ruckelshaus said he expressed surprise to Sears and Bulen that they would want him on the ticket when he had heard Reagan say so often he wanted a running mate who was philosophically compatible with himself. Ruckelshaus said he considered himself more liberal than Schweiker. It was for this reason mainly, he said, that he felt the need to talk to Reagan.

The former deputy attorney general, who refused along with Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson Nixon's order to fire Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, and was fired with Richardson in turn, said his Watergate history was not mentioned. "But that's obviously what they had in mind," he said—a way neutralize the Watergate issue.